

# **The Economic Contribution of Migrants to Ancient Societies. Technological Transfer, Integration, Exploitation and Interaction of Economic Mentalities**

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## **Introduction**

Why and how should we talk about migration at a congress focused on ancient economies? Migrations and economy are in fact closely intertwined: Human mobility frequently depends on economic factors and at the same time plays a proactive role in economic processes. Although the discussion about migration has been very important in archaeology in the last 20 years,<sup>1</sup> the topic of the economic role of migrants, their embedding in local economies, and their role as brokers within the global economic system have often remained in the background.<sup>2</sup>

The economic focus of the 19th International Congress of Classical Archaeology in Cologne and Bonn offered a unique occasion to approach this topic. Ten junior scholars were invited to present their working proposals and build a discussion platform on migration and economy in ancient societies.<sup>3</sup> The aim of the meeting was to point out the potential of this research field for future studies, rather than to exhaustively cover its wider spectrum. The choice of case studies from different cultural and chronological frames, from Middle Kingdom Egypt to late Imperial Pannonia, demands that one focus on the general and methodological implications and invites one to consider the economic aspects of ancient migration as an entanglement between human choices and socio-environmental contexts.<sup>4</sup> Some common research questions have been proposed as a starting point of the discussion: which archaeological data are reliable indicators of the economic role of migrants? How did different economic and political systems affect the economic integration or segregation of migrants in local communities? How did different strategies of integration affect local economies? Did migrants have a networking role in ancient economic systems?

All these questions require complex answers. The lack of archaeological sources for many forms of migration, in particular on seasonal or temporary mobility, makes it challenging to individuate migrants in the fragmented archaeological record.<sup>5</sup> The collection and interpretation of the material sources related to their economic habits and to their participation in the economy of host societies is a further difficulty. But perhaps the hardest challenge is to deal with the potential bias inherent in archaeological research on such a sensitive topic, which is currently a focal point of contemporary international politics.<sup>6</sup> The topicality of the debate on global migrations can affect the analysis of the archaeological evidence and even more the restitution of the related narratives.<sup>7</sup> The way we are dealing with our sources, not just in terms of interpretation, but also in terms of preselection, might create divergent narratives on the same

archaeological records. Tracing back the history of the archaeological research on the topic, we can for example note that attention has been paid in a very selective fashion to specific aspects of the economic role of migrants. The colonial approach created a dichotomic narrative on settlers and indigenous, coexisting with separate technical skills, consumption mentalities, labor division and exploitation needs.<sup>8</sup> This perspective has been overcome in the last decade by the postcolonial approach to archaeological contexts of interaction.<sup>9</sup> Not just the actuality of this debate in the archaeological literature, but also the actual sociological debate constitutes an opportunity to develop new research questions about consumerism, economic mentalities and the networking role of migrants.<sup>10</sup>

The consciousness of dangers and limits implicit in this analysis prompts discussion of different methodological approaches. In attempting to limit the damage caused by such biases, we have firmly located our debate in the history of research, discussed limits and potentialities of applied methodologies and contextualized ancient behavior in its cultural references.<sup>11</sup> The presence of a rich secondary literature on our case studies, although not directly focused on the topic, has further helped to maintain a balance between innovation and tradition. The collected contributions are presented chronologically.

Lukas Bohnenkämper approaches the methodological issue of the relationship between written sources and archaeological record, in an effort to interpret the economic role of migrants in Middle Kingdom Egypt. The resulting different narratives in the archaeological literature offer a chance to critically evaluate the potential and limits of such analyses. The two following contributions focus on the economic impact of the embodied technological habitus of migrants: Jeremy Hayne deals with the presence of groups of Phoenicians in Bronze Age Sardinia, pointing out how the interaction between local economic mentalities and new consumption models can result in a growing demand for new products, which can be satisfied by local producers introducing new know-how. Kewin Peche-Quilichini and Laura Pagliantini present a melting-pot society on the western Mediterranean islands of Sardinia, Corsica and Elba between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, discussing the relationships between general Mediterranean commercial networks and specialized forms of migration, such as the technology-driven migration of craftsmen.<sup>12</sup> Alexander Boix presents a paper on the entanglement between political decision-making, migration and economy, built around the case study of migration of Athenian potters to Boeotia after the Peloponnesian War. The next contribution by the editor deals with the consumerism of Ligurian migrants in Etruscan coastal centers at the late Hellenistic time, focusing on the ostentatious display of a specific consumption habitus in immigrants' funerary assemblages. In the last contribution, Jan Bulas deals with the complexity of implications of mobility across the borders of the Roman Empire, in Pannonia, between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, discussing the introduction of Roman coins and the stylistic and technological changes in pottery production within the local communities of the Przeworsk culture.

The fragility of archaeology in building explanatory models on complex non-linear human behaviors, such as the economic role of migrants, called for this short introduction, which ends in an invitation to consider the proposed materials thoroughly. The purpose of the meeting was to kick-start the discussion on the economic contribution of migrants to ancient economies and not to offer global explanatory models. This is the reason why the present book will offer more questions than answers.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In the last ten years, following the first attempts to define new methodological tools to detect migration in archaeology (Anthony 1990; Burmeister 2000; Andresen 2004), the interaction between archaeological data, interpretation and narratives has been reviewed and discussed (Hakenbeck 2008; Burmeister 2013; van Dommelen 2014; Burmeister 2017). In particular these works pointed out the necessity to move from a concept of migration as an explanatory category, to considering it a field of enquiry, which deserves to be studied with appropriate conceptual tools (Anthony 1990, 905; Hakenbeck 2008, 10 f.; Burmeister 2013, 229). Since mass migration can very seldom be proven in archaeology (even in the so called ‘migration period’: Heather 2017, 201), we are here rather aiming to understand the behavior of individual migrants or small groups of immigrants as economic actors. By dealing with groups of them, all contributors refer to family dimension or other small social clusters, based on the social position or on the technical role or function of migrants, as aggregative working corporations. In the present book, the term migration is thus considered to denote the different forms and dimensions of human mobility described in the works cited (Anthony 1990, 901–905; Prien 2005, 46 f.; Hakenbeck 2008, 19–21).

<sup>2</sup> The general economic implications of migrations are frequently considered push or pull factors of ancient migrations in Prehistory and Medieval Archaeology (Anthony 1990, 900 f.; Burmeister 2000, 543; Prien 2005, 19 f.). The agency of migrants can be rather detected in studies about the transmission of

innovation in production processes (Anthony 1990, 903. Initially as diffusionism and later as transnationalism: Hahn 2017, 71–75) and about migration and trade (Abay – Çevik 2005, 64–69).

<sup>3</sup> The junior researchers invited differed in background and academic outlook, so as to offer different approaches to the topic.

<sup>4</sup> Engaging with this complex puzzle offers a way of understanding migration as a multilayered process that is frequently neglected in archaeological analysis: Van Dommelen 2014, 479.

<sup>5</sup> On the risk of misinterpreting or overinterpreting the material sources to explain migration: Burmeister 2017, 58–60. On the relationship between forms of mobility and sources: Kelly 1992, 43. 57 f.; van Oyen 2017, 55. An earlier interest in non-mass-migration and the economic impact of small groups of people can be found in the research on itinerant craftsmen: Martelli – Cristofani 1977 (For the actual views on the topic: Jockey 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Ideological background and scholarly presumptions are the principal causes of this bias in: Abay – Çevik 2005, 62.

<sup>7</sup> The consciousness of this bias has partially paralyzed the archaeological research on a topic, which was growing in importance in sociological disciplines: Burmeister 2000, 539.

<sup>8</sup> For a recent review of colonial approaches in Classical Archaeology and Ancient History: van Dommelen 1997, 307–309; van Dommelen 2012, 396–398, with further literature.

<sup>9</sup> Postcolonial approaches were first taken into account in the conceptual field of romanization studies and Roman Imperialism (van Dommelen 2011). For a postcolonial approach in assessing the economic roles of settlers and indigenous in Magna Graecia: Zuchriegel 2016, in particular 171–179.

<sup>10</sup> For the actuality of the topic of migration and economy in archaeological research see the thematic issue of the Review of the German Archaeological Institute *Archäologie Weltweit* 2.1,2014 “Vernetze Welten. Mobilität, Migration und Handel in der Antike” and the issue of the Excellence Cluster Topoi *Raumwissen* 18,2017 “Migration”. The perception of the cultural value of the topic and of its impact in archaeology is growing also in the field of public archaeology and museum communication (Oswald 2017, 10–21).

<sup>11</sup> As a reaction to the problems linked to the research field, we proposed to revitalize the discussion rather than to avoid it, in accordance with the constructivist approach taken by Anthony (Anthony 1990, 895 f.).

<sup>12</sup> Both contributions must not be interpreted as an expression of diffusionism but rather as focused on the economic role of the implicit embodied technological habitus of migrants: Burmeister 2017, 61.

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